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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6732
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0627
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4166
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7717
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5277
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1151
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1064
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001052

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM
SUBJECT: MANDALAY CRACKDOWN MILDER THAN RANGOON

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUBJECT: MANDALAY CRACKDOWN MILDER THAN RANGOON

¶1. (C) Summary. Poloff visited Mandalay to observe any changes in the city since the September uprising and to try to obtain details of the demonstrations and subsequent military crackdown there. According to contacts we met in Mandalay, the demonstrations here were not as political as they were in Rangoon and the ensuing crackdown was far less violent. Monasteries and foreign consulates in the city still have a higher than normal security presence, while numbers of monks on the streets and in monasteries appear drastically decreased. Tourism in the city has also decreased, with major hotels reporting thousands of canceled rooms in September and October. End Summary.

Run-up to the Demonstrations

¶2. (C) On October 18 to 19 Poloff visited Mandalay to learn the details of the September uprising and subsequent military crackdown. Myin Htet, a local underground journalist, told us that even before the August 15 fuel price hikes, the government banned several cultural events in Mandalay, a city often considered to be a religious and cultural center in Burma. The canceled events included World Photography Day, which was to be held in Mandalay for the first time, and an Iron Cross concert, Burma's most famous rock band, among several others. The Green Elephant, once a center for literature and journalism events, was completely deserted both times we visited during two days, because all of their events have been canceled or the participants were afraid to gather. Myin Htet suspected that the government started canceling large gatherings before the price hikes because of rumors that the 88 Generation Student Leaders were organizing activities in commemoration of the August 8, 1988 uprising.

Demonstrations in Mandalay

¶13. (C) Myin Htet said that monks from Ma Soe Yein, one of Mandalay's biggest monasteries, led demonstrations beginning September 20. On September 22, civilians joined the demonstrations by forming protective human chains around the monks as they had in Rangoon. Myin Htet reported that the demonstrations reached their peak on September 25 when approximately ten thousand marchers participated. Both our contacts noted that the civilians in Mandalay did not appear as organized as they had in Rangoon and that the chanting remained purely religious throughout the marches, only taking on a political nature as they died down in the first days of the crackdown. Also in contrast to Rangoon, where groups of marchers came together to form large demonstrations, the marchers in Mandalay kept their distance from one another, simultaneously maintaining several columns of demonstrators throughout the downtown area.

Crackdown Milder Than in Rangoon

¶14. (C) The military began their crackdown on September 26, and both Myin Htet and Kyaw Yin Myint, another journalist that we met, emphasized the restraint the military used in comparison to the Rangoon crackdown. Security forces did fire warning shots, and while rumors circulated that a few people had been injured, they had no knowledge anyone had been killed during the crackdown. Myin Htet reported that security forces only raided one monastery, Phyang Mein. Phyang Mein is isolated from the other major monasteries, which are all located in the same general neighborhood. Myin Htet heard from local residents that these monasteries established an alarm system to alert and evacuate their monks in the event that they were raided.

¶15. (C) When we asked why the crackdown in Mandalay was less severe than in Rangoon, Kyaw Yin Myint and Myin Htet had different opinions. Kyaw Yin Myint suspected that the

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soldiers in Mandalay were closer to the local community. During the demonstrations he saw several tea shops airing DVB and proprietors telling soldiers they would serve soldiers for free if they watched DVB. Myin Htet believed that the close relationship between monks and the community, and fear of further violence, restrained the soldiers. Regardless of any restraint soldiers in Mandalay exercised, the crackdown was sufficient to quell all demonstrations.

Security Presence Visible Around Major Monasteries

¶16. (C) A significant security presence still surrounds the neighborhood housing Myat Taung, We Thouk Tar Youna, and Ma Soe Yein Monasteries, the three monasteries whose monks led the demonstrations. We also noticed a few plainclothes security forces near the entrances to the monasteries. Under normal circumstances, each would house thousands of monks, but we only saw a few visible within the walls. Our contacts in Rangoon and Mandalay said that chief abbots have sent many monks back to their villages in order to avoid arrest. At Sasana University Mandalay, a university exclusively for monks, we only saw three monks on what should have been a busy weekday afternoon. We saw a few monks collecting alms in the morning, but not nearly as many as would be expected under normal circumstances. Their bowls, however, were almost always full, presumably because of increased public goodwill since the demonstrations and crackdown.

Current Situation Calm As Tourism Industry Suffers

¶17. (C) Aside from far fewer monks and a slightly increased security presence around monasteries and consulates, the situation in Mandalay appeared normal on the surface. Tourism, however, appeared significantly diminished. A tour guide at our hotel reported that nine thousand rooms were

canceled in September and October. He thought that the cancellations were not due to difficulty obtaining visas, but rather for fear of the unstable situation.

¶18. (C) Neither of our contacts had specific information on how the situation might evolve in the coming months, but both seemed confident that we have not seen the end of the demonstrations. Kyaw Yin Myint sensed that the fear among residents of Mandalay was not as great as in Rangoon and that anger over violence against monks by this devout population ran very deep.

¶19. (C) Comment. Despite Mandalay Division Commander Major General Khin Zaw's notorious brutality, his forces appear to have exercised far more restraint than the military used in Rangoon. Nevertheless, growing economic hardship and the underlying anger among the public over the violence used against the monks has only increased the popular discontent, paving the way for further uprisings. End Comment.

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